

greater part should choose to recant and live; but several^ including three priests, preferred to be burnt to death.¹

The depositions on which these heretics were convicted have fortunately come down to us, preserving a curious picture of nonconformist life in the fifteenth century. * Item Nicolas Belward is one of the same sect and hath a New Testament which he bought at London for four marks and forty pence, and taught the said William Wright and Margery his wife and wrought with them the space of one year and studied diligently upon the said New Testament.' This being one of the charges brought as condemnatory evidence into the Bishop's Court, it does not seem that the Church authorities were as tolerant of Bible study as is sometimes asserted. * Item John Pert, late servant of Thomas Moon, is one of the same sect and can read well, and did read in the presence of William White.' These passages show not only that the Bishop of Norwich persecuted for Bible-reading,² but that the Lollards had further difficulties to contend with in searching the Scriptures. * Four marks and forty pence' would have been a prohibitive sum for many, and not only was the Book a rare treasure, but the man who could * read well' was rare treasure also. Some other charges are worth noting. Suspicion was aroused against Margery Backster and her husband by the horrible discovery of * a brass pot standing over the fire with a piece of bacon and oatmeal seething in it' during the season of Lent. She spoke her mind on the subject with more valour than discretion, declaring * that every faithful woman is not bound to fast in Lent/ and that 'it were better to eat the fragments left upon Thursday at night on the fasting days than to go to the market to bring themselves in debt to buy fish.' Margery had even invited the informer to come ' with Joan her maid/ ' secretly in the night to her chamber and there she should hear her husband read the law of Christ unto them, which law was written in a book her husband was wont to read to her by night/ She also declared her intention of not being ruled by any priest, of not going on pilgrimage to our Lady of Walsingham or any other shrine, and her

¹ Foie, iiL 587-8, 699.

^a See Ap.